

Returning to the pool

Guidance for **Community Swimming**

Published 17 June 2020 v2

Covid-19: Returning to the pool

Foreword

We have all been missing the water during the Covid-19 enforced closure of swimming pools. For many of our members across all our disciplines, this will have been the longest period out of the water, which can take a toll on both our physical and mental wellbeing.

As the recognised national governing body, Swim England is therefore delighted to be able to produce this guidance to help ensure the safe return to the water once swimming pools are allowed to open once more.

Our first priority remains the safety of everyone involved in our sports, be they participants, leisure centre staff, coaches or volunteers. We will at all times be led by the latest government guidance and regulations. This guidance has been produced in collaboration with experts from across the sector and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to its creation.

The guidance covers a range of settings and audiences, including;

- Operators
- Users
- Swimming Lessons
- Community Swimming
- Clubs.

When pools reopen, it will not be a case of 'business as usual' and we know that things will have to be different, but if we are to play our part in protecting the NHS from another wave of Covid-19 admissions, it is important we follow the latest guidance and adjust to the new 'normal'.

Swim England will continue to push for more financial support for the swimming sector to ensure we can all continue to enjoy the sports we love.



Jane Nickerson
Chief Executive, Swim England

Guidance for Community Swimming

Introduction

The following has been developed in co-operation with industry partners.

This document aims to support operators and help guide their pool users when returning to swimming facilities, to take part in community swimming or instructor led sessions, following the period of closure due to Covid-19. It provides guidance on reducing the risk of Covid-19 transmission within the swimming pool environment.

It will highlight the continued requirements for safe social distancing and enhanced hygiene regimes, along with guidance on how this will impact on the different experience the pool user will have.

Links to best practice and other industry standard guidance will be provided where appropriate.

As with all environments, there is still a level of risk of Covid-19 transmission in aquatic settings that requires control measures to be implemented, based on your Covid-19 Risk Assessment. Operators must create their own risk assessment per activity before implementing any of the activities listed below.

Anyone taking part in a community swimming session should also familiarise themselves with the [Swim England Guidance for Users](#) before attending.

Community swimming

The following guidance relates to activities for the public including casual swimming, lane swimming and family fun sessions.

- When determining the capacity of lane swimming, operators should consider the advice on assessing risk in the pool as set out in the [Swim England Guidance for Operators](#).
- Operators should consider double width lanes when setting up for lane swimming.
- Lifeguards should adhere to government guidance on social distancing (please refer to the [RLSS UK's guidance on lifeguard provision](#), or your lifeguard training provider).
- Participants should adhere to government guidance on social distancing when walking or waiting on poolside.
- Operators should review their pool programme in advance of opening, to limit multi-activity use at any one time.
- Operators should review available pool space to allow for correct social distancing, including entry and exit points.
- While static in the water participants should adhere to government guidance on social distancing in relation to others in the pool or those on poolside.

- When travelling through the water, participants should aim to maintain as much distance as possible from other participants.
- Operators should consider asking participants not to overtake whilst lane swimming in order to comply with social distancing measures.
- Participants from the same household can participate amongst themselves without social distancing as per government guidelines.
- All equipment should be sanitised before and after each activity. This can be achieved simply and effectively by rinsing equipment in the pool.
- Where possible participants should bring their own equipment.
- Equipment that cannot be sanitised in the pool should be appropriately cleaned between activities. This should include surfaces in high traffic areas such as handrails and towel hooks.

Instructor led activity

The following guidance relates to activities that require an instructor on poolside but are not a swimming lesson. This may include aqua aerobics, aquafit, aqua circuits, exercise referral and Swimfit etc.

- When determining the capacity of classes, operators should consider the advice on assessing risk in the pool as set out in the [Swim England Guidance for Operators](#).
- Lifeguards should adhere to government guidance on social distancing (please see [RLSS guidance on lifeguards](#), or your lifeguard training provider).
- Instructors should deliver from poolside.
- Instructors should adhere to government guidance on social distancing.
- Participants should adhere to government guidance on social distancing when walking or waiting on poolside.
- Operators should review available pool space to allow for correct social distancing, including entry and exit points.
- While static in the water participants should adhere to government guidance on social distancing in relation to others in the pool or those on poolside.
- When session planning, instructors should aim to rotate the use of different pieces of equipment from one session to the next rather than during a session, this will minimise the amount of cleaning required.
- All equipment should be sanitised before and after each activity. This can be achieved simply and effectively by rinsing equipment in the pool.
- Where possible participants should bring their own equipment.

- Equipment that cannot be sanitised in the pool should be appropriately cleaned between activities. This should include surfaces in high traffic areas such as handrails and towel hooks.

Detailed guidance for operators on running community swimming and instructor led sessions can be found below.

If you have any questions relating to the guidance, please contact guidance@swimming.org.

Guidance for operators on running community swimming and instructor led sessions

Summary of guidance with practical ideas for implementation

Guidance	Practical ideas and considerations
<p>Pool users - Customer journey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure marketing collateral and communication channels are up to date with latest information. • Consider your communications and communication methods to make sure they are inclusive and that participants can access them. • Share pool user guidance with advice for participants on what to bring and time frame for when to arrive. • Prepare guidance/interactive video on the customer journey to and through the changing rooms on to poolside, so participants know what to expect.
<p>Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit multi activity use of the pool - programme one activity at a time with clear start and finish times. • Offer pre-bookable sessions only. These should be bookable in at least two ways, e.g. online and by phone. • Allow time in between activities for cleaning and change over of participants. • The use of slides, flumes, inflatables and special water features to be risk assessed on an individual basis to ensure the risk of Covid-19 can be adequately controlled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review pool programme and new timetable to be produced. • If the facility has more than one pool, consider alternating the use of pools for activities to help with cleaning and social distancing. • A time limit could be applied to lane swimming bookings depending on demand.
<p>Applying social distancing – poolside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants should adhere to guidelines on social distancing. • Operators should review available pool space to allow for correct social distancing, including entry and exit points into the pool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply a one-way system around poolside for participants. • Separate entry and exit points into the pool to be identified if possible. • Signage to be displayed to highlight any measures and changes to participants.

<p>Applying social distancing – in the pool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators should consider the advice on assessing risk in the pool as set out in the Swim England Guidance for Operators. • While static in the water participants should adhere to government guidance on social distancing in relation to others in the pool or those on poolside. • When travelling through the water, participants should aim to maintain as much distance as possible from other participants. • People from the same household can participate without social distancing as per government guidelines, however participants must adhere to government guidance on social distancing in relation to participants in the pool that are not from their household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lane etiquette signage to be used. • Consider double width lanes for lane swimming. • During lane swimming, allocate a slow, medium and fast paced lane/section. • Consider positioning the faster, more confident swimmers in the centre of the pool. • Participants should not overtake whilst swimming. • Consider using markers on the poolside, along the length of the pool, to identify 2 metre distances. • Participants should not leave their drinks bottle at the end of the lane. Consider allocating a space for participants to leave their drink and take a rest out of the pool. Participants should be reminded to adhere to social distancing guidelines. • Consider configuring the pool for family sessions – each household has their own section of the pool. • Consider adding structure to your family sessions by utilising an activator/instructor to deliver family fun based activities from the poolside. • During lane sessions a household could book a lane. • Consider using floor stickers/markers to allocate a position for participants during classes.
<p>Equipment usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment should be sanitised before and after each activity, including surfaces in high traffic areas such as handrails and towel hooks. • Participants should bring their own equipment, including drink bottles. • Instructors should aim to rotate the use of different pieces of equipment from one session to the next rather than during a session, this will minimise the amount of cleaning required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate your cleaning regime and schedule with users. • Instructors should be responsible for cleaning their own equipment.
<p>Instructor led activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should deliver from poolside. • Instructors should adhere to government guidance on social distancing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration to be given to the safety and management of the group. This may mean reviewing the amount of pool space required and class ratios. • When session planning instructors should take into consideration any changes in pool

	<p>space and ratios. Poolside based activities should also be avoided, participants should remain in the water for the duration of the session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the instructor is delivering to a larger area of pool space than usual consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voice projection and protection • using a microphone (consideration for use – microphones with foam mouthpieces not to be shared) • use of demonstrations • using visual cards.
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1. Customer journey

Helping users to make informed decisions

How do you ensure your facility is providing the appropriate information to support users in making decisions about whether to return to the pool?

We expect to see a high level of people wanting to return to gyms and leisure facilities, but due to Covid-19, this is not likely to happen as soon as facilities re-open.

It will be more important than ever to ensure you are effectively communicating with existing users (prior to Covid-19), and potential users, regarding the health and safety measures you have put in place, the programme of activity you are offering and what users should expect when they visit.

Communications should be inclusive and information provided through a variety of methods (e.g. online and print) to ensure all participants can access this information.

Website

Your website is quite likely the first interaction users will have with your facility. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the information is clear and concise. You should consider including:

- A landing page with Covid-19 information, this could include the [Swim England Guidance for Users](#).
- An up to date pool timetable.
- Information on session types, including descriptions for each activity to highlight what the session involves and any new measures you have put in place regarding social distancing etc.
- Information on price, whether booking is required and the details of how to book.
- Information on the changing rooms, including the changing room layout, any changes due to social distancing, information on cleaning regimes, access to lockers, hairdryers and other vanity facilities.
- Clothing and personal effects permitted on poolside, including your swimwear policy.

- Use of equipment, including what is provided and what users should bring.
- Seating facilities for viewing and any social distancing restrictions.
- Parking facilities and travel choices i.e. public transport links.

Virtual tour

You should also consider producing a video(s) to provide a virtual tour of the facility. This will allow users to familiarise themselves with the facility before they visit and help them to understand what to expect in terms of adjustments to allow for social distancing. All this will aid them in feeling more comfortable and confident when visiting the facility.

The video(s) can be made available on your website and promoted via your social media channels.

Further guidance on producing a virtual tour and what to include can be found in [the facility tour video guide](#).

As an example [Cockburn ARC, Australia](#) have produced their own short video.

Customer service

By providing the best customer service, you can build trust and loyalty to your business. Customer service is an asset, often valued over price that can help you manage expectations, smooth out problems and create a positive brand reputation.

Involving staff in discussions and agreeing what good customer service looks like (e.g. effective communication, taking ownership, being positive and friendly, being knowledgeable) will empower them to action this on a daily basis.

Here are some customer service ideas and thoughts that you may like to incorporate into your plans for re-opening:

- Staff to receive training on newly introduced social distancing and hygiene measures.
- Review the options for contacting your centre; phone, social media, e-mail etc. You may need to be prepared for an increase in phone and email traffic as users have questions about returning.
- Staff to be made aware of any changes to the aquatic programme.
- Pool user guidance to be made available to staff should they receive any questions from users about what they should bring and expect. This could also be displayed on reception.
- Front of house staff to be provided with a FAQ document.
- Utilise customer service announcements for reinforcing social distancing and hygiene measures.
- Front of house staff to greet users and make them aware of social distancing and hygiene measures that have been introduced, especially in relation to changing facilities, and make them aware of signage.

- Consider offering a refund or alternative session for those that may have booked but are feeling unwell or are having to self-isolate. This will help encourage users not to attend and avoid any further spread of the Covid-19 virus.

2. Programming

It is inevitable, that as a result of Covid-19, you will need to assess the viability of opening your swimming pool, whilst adhering to government guidelines on social distancing. This will involve a review of your pool programme.

A phased approach to returning activities is likely to be required in order to manage the requirements of social distancing. You will also need to take into consideration the availability of staff to deliver activities within your programme, due to illness and the government's guidance around self-isolating.

The risk factor profile can help you assess the risk of potential transmission of Covid-19 and this can be used as part of your risk assessment to help you understand the viability of an activity or session.

By limiting multi-activity use of the pool and programming to only one activity at a time, with clear start and finish times, it will be easier to manage participant numbers and additional time can be programmed for cleaning. This will also help control the number of participants using the changing rooms at any one time.

If your facility has a main pool and training pool you will need to risk assess whether it is possible to run two activities at the same time (one in each pool). One consideration to help you achieve this would be to stagger the start and finish times of the sessions, to manage the number of participants in the changing rooms and on poolside at any one time.

To help manage the capacity of sessions you may choose to offer pre-bookable sessions only. Therefore, a time limit may need to be applied to casual and lane swimming bookings. According to Swim England's tracker, based on people who have 'been swimming', the average time spent in the water was 47 minutes. This covers all health, fitness and casual swimmers (but not club).

Although you will need to review your programme in light of the government's guidelines on social distancing, it is still important to understand your target audience and their needs or concerns at this time. We have produced a pool programme [customer survey template](#) that you may wish to use to help you achieve this.

When it's time to promote your pool programme consider:

- Timetables that use different formats (list and table).
- Use of colour coding.
- High resolutions for visually impaired.
- Ensure names of sessions are consistent across your facilities. Consider naming conventions prior to promotion to avoid confusion.
- Is it simple and easy for your users to find and access your pool timetable?

Applying social distancing - poolside

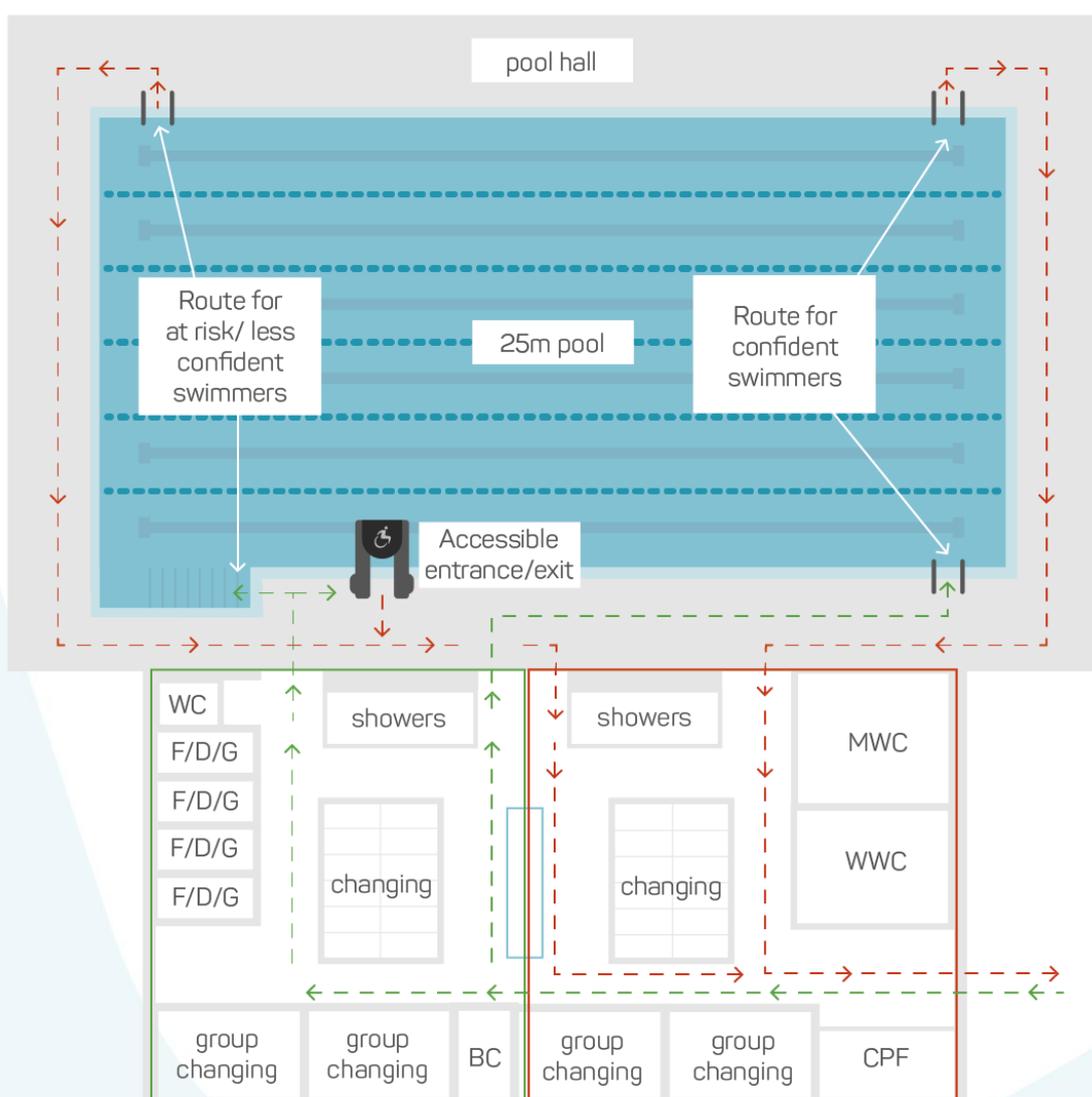
You will need to think about how you can help staff and participants adhere to social distancing guidelines whilst on poolside.

Depending on the size of your pool deck, you should consider operating a one-way system, separate entry and exit points into the pool should also be identified if possible.

It is important to clearly communicate any measures you put in place with your users. You could display temporary signage and use directional arrows to demonstrate the changes to users. Consideration also needs to be given to the start of a session when participants arrive on poolside, will they be able to enter the water immediately or will participants be required to wait on poolside? If this is the case, then can participants maintain a safe social distance?

These measures may also impact on the delivery of your activity and where it is positioned in the pool, so you will need to bear this in mind when reviewing your pool programme.

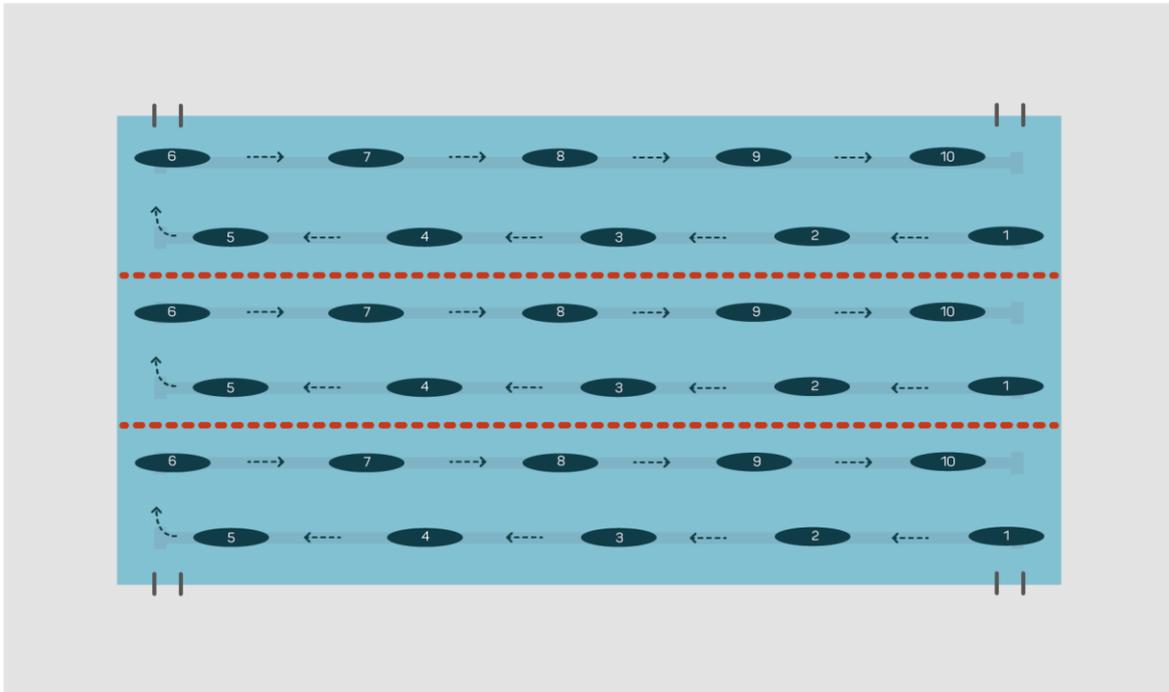
We understand that every pool is different but the diagram below provides an example of how you could manage social distancing from the changing room to poolside.



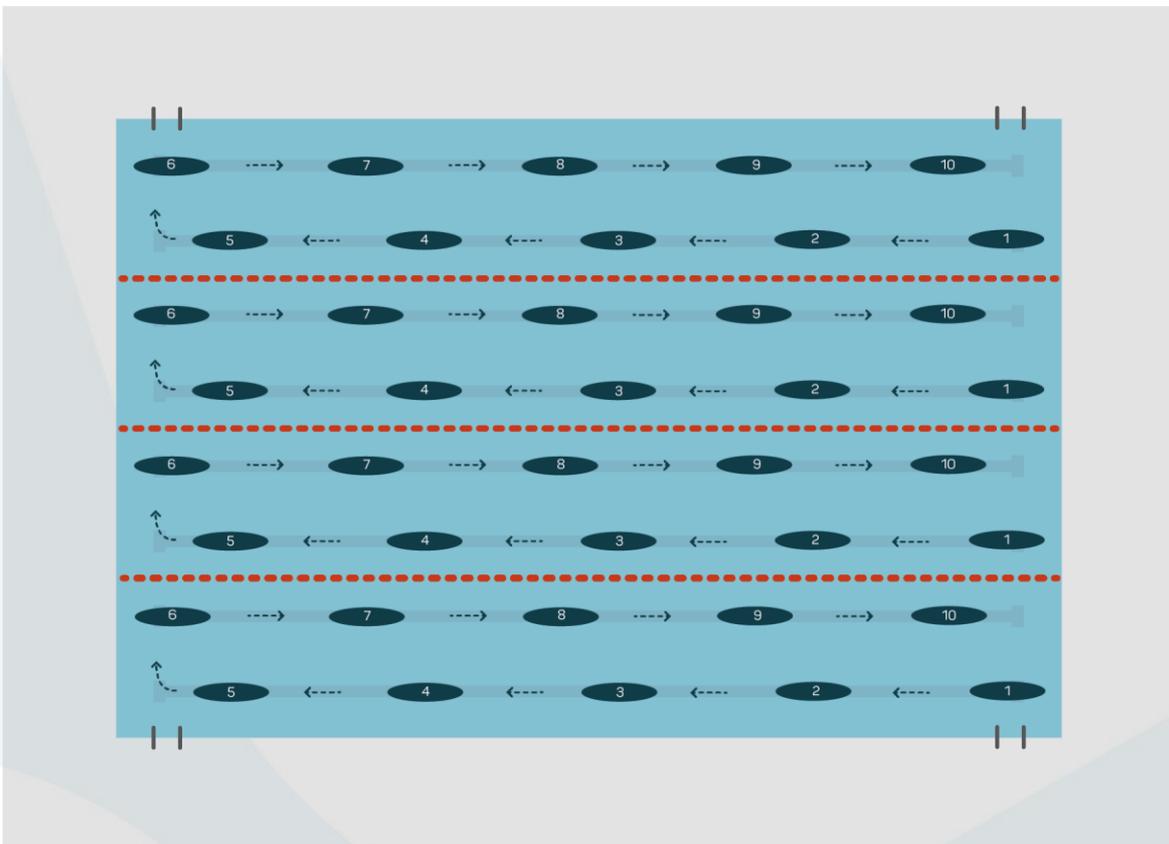
Applying social distancing – in the pool

Lane swimming

The following diagram provides an example of how you could manage social distancing in the pool for lane swimming.



Lane swimming 25x12.5m pool 10 to a double lane



Lane swimming 25x16.5m pool 10 to a double lane

The risk factor profile has been developed to help you assess the risk of potential transmission of Covid-19 and to understand how social distancing can be applied within the pool when participants are travelling.

To allow for social distancing during lane swimming, the use of double width lanes should be considered and a slow, medium, fast paced lane/section should be allocated. The slower paced swimmers may feel more confident to be positioned along the side of the pool, with the faster paced swimmers in the centre. Each lane should follow the same direction of travel, this will mean swimmers are unable to swim side by side, minimising the risk of potential transmission of Covid-19.

It is advised that participants should not overtake whilst swimming as this will avoid close contact between participants. Instead, when reaching the end of the length, participants should move to the edge of the lane and turn their head away to allow others to turn at the wall and maintain social distancing measures.

You should consider allocating an area on poolside for participants to leave their drink and take a rest out of the pool. This will prevent participants from congregating at the end of the pool where it is difficult to maintain a safe social distance.

Consideration should also be given to using markers to help participants visually recognise a safe social distance. For example, markers could be positioned on the poolside, along the length of the pool, to identify 2 metre distances between participants during lane swimming and floor stickers/markers could be used to allocate a position for participants during classes.

Pool and lane etiquette

Research shows customers can find unspoken pool and lane etiquette to be confusing and intimidating.

To create a more welcoming environment, we suggest providing clear and positive guidance, with a change of tone from what you cannot do to what customers **can** do.

You may have to update the pool and lane etiquette you had in place pre Covid-19 to ensure users are aware of any changes you have had to put in to place, so that government guidelines on social distancing and hygiene can be adhered to. It is therefore important that you communicate clearly an updated pool and lane etiquette to all users.

The [Swim England Guidance for Users](#) could be used to inform your pool etiquette.

If introducing or updating your guidance on lane swimming, here are some ideas on terms to include. Please do adapt to your pool needs.

To ensure everyone enjoys lane swimming, here are some guidelines to get the most out of your time in the pool:

- Swim in a lane appropriate to your swimming ability/speed.
- Please follow the direction of the lane boards and swim in single file. This will help to prevent accidents and ensure participants can maintain a safe social distance.
- Allow faster swimmers to pass you at the end of each length. Move to the edge of the lane and turn your head away.

- If you are continually being passed please consider moving to a slower lane.
- If you need to take a rest, please exit the pool and use the designated area on poolside.
- If using equipment such as kick boards or pull buoys, consider moving to a slower lane temporarily so you do not hinder others swimming full strokes.
- Lifeguards are here for everyone's safety. If they ask you to adhere to the above guidance, your cooperation would be appreciated.

Family sessions

Participants from the same household are not required to socially distance from each other but will be required to maintain a 2 metre distance from others. To support the delivery of family swim sessions in a safe way, adhering to social distancing guidelines, you should consider configuring the pool so that a household is able to book their own section or area of pool space.

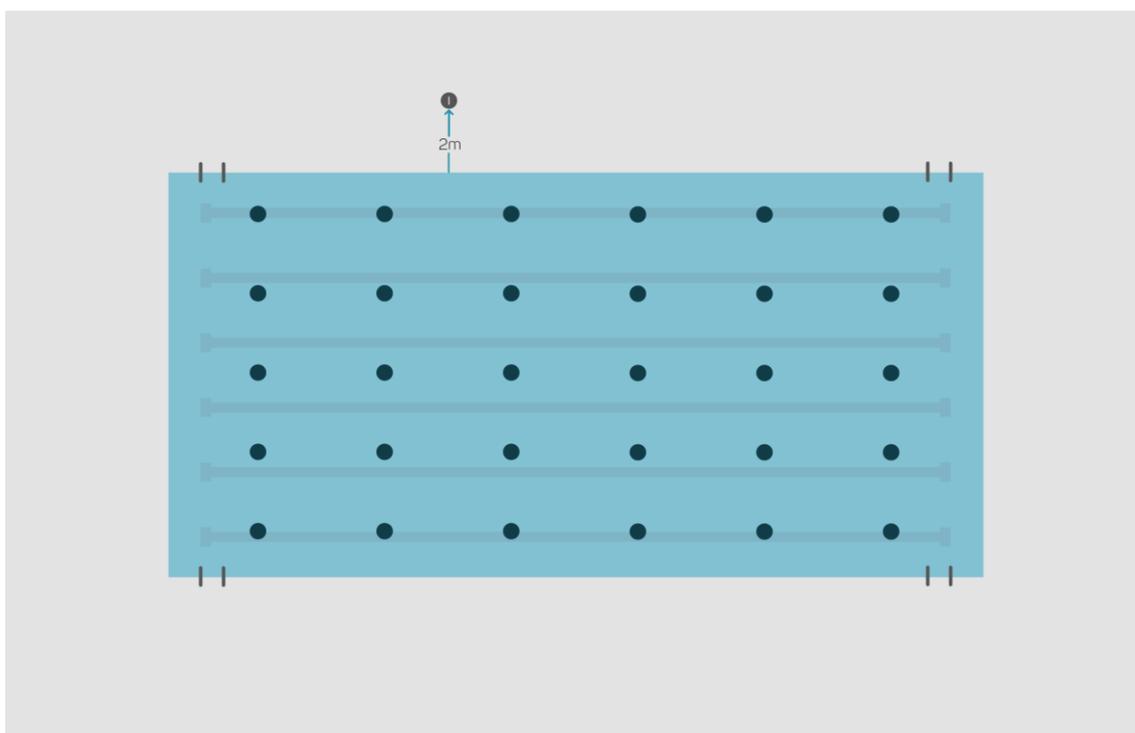
You should also consider adding structure to your session by utilising an activator/instructor to deliver family fun based activities from the poolside.

Alternatively, if members of the same household are keen fitness swimmers you could provide an option for them to book a lane. Consideration will need to be given here to your age restriction policy for lane swimming and whether this could be waived for an interim period.

With regards to children swimming unaccompanied, CIMSPA guidance states that all children under the age of eight should always be accompanied in the water and changing areas during unprogrammed swimming sessions by a parent. Operators can use their own discretion to temporarily adjust this age limit should they feel necessary, in light of the government guidelines on social distancing.

Instructor led sessions

In-line with social distancing requirements, participants will need to maintain a social distance of 2 metres apart from each other. The diagram below provides an example of how you could manage an instructor led aquatic fitness type session.



Instructor led 25x12.5m pool

As every pool is different, the instructor will need to consider the safety and management of the group in accordance with the pool space available and the number of participants and this should be reflected in the session plan.

You will need to consider how participants enter and exit the pool to take up their position, avoiding close contact with others. Floor stickers/markers could be used to allocate a position to participants once in the pool.

Incorporating poolside based activities into the session should be avoided.

Session descriptors

It is important to use consistent naming and description protocols for sessions across your facilities to help users make an informed decision. Give users as much information as possible, so they are clear on what to expect. If you run the same session across all of your facilities, do ensure each facility uses the same name and description.

The following points should be considered:

- Name of session.
- Brief description – swimming, movement in water, jogging, walking etc.
- Who it is suitable for – male, female, children, families, inclusive, 50+ years-old etc.
- Intensity level – use sliding scale or symbol indicators.
- Health messages and benefits associated with the session - calories burned, use as rehab session.

- Structure – is it instructor led, someone on poolside available to give advice and support, a progressive session?
- Location – where in the pool does the session take place? (Deep water, shallow water, access to steps etc.).
- Accessibility – is the session accessible to all? Is it a tailored session for a specific audience? What is accessible about the session?
- Equipment – what should participants bring to the session (e.g. goggles) and what is any equipment is provided (e.g. noodles).
- Equipment guidance – inform customers of which sessions within the programme they are permitted to use their own training/swimming aids i.e. flippers/hand paddles
- Poolside environment – lighting, music, and lane ropes etc.
- Cost of session/activity – Is it bookable in advance or pay and play?
- Other session messages – normal swimwear policy applies, admissions policy applies.

When promoting session information on your website you could use “hover overs” to display key session information. You could also use “click throughs” to provide information and pictures/videos of your sessions taking place.

If you have your pool timetable available in print format, then consider providing detailed session descriptions on the reverse of timetables.

3. Equipment

To improve user confidence in the measures you have put in place to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19, you should consider communicating your cleaning regime and schedule with users.

Instructors should be responsible for the equipment they require for a session and the cleaning of equipment at the end of the session.

Equipment should be cleaned in-between use. Submerging equipment in adequately disinfected swimming pool water will reduce the risk of transmission of enveloped viruses.

To help minimise the amount of cleaning required, instructors should rotate the use of different types of equipment from one session to the next, rather than during a session. If consecutive sessions are being delivered, that require the same equipment, you should consider using two separate sets of equipment to allow time for cleaning.

Participants should also be encouraged to bring their own equipment and should not share equipment during the session.

4. Instructors

Instructors should only deliver from poolside and are required to maintain a social distance of 2 metres from other poolside staff and participants. If instructors are responsible for providing safety cover they should refer to the [RLSS UK's guidance](#) on this.

Due to social distancing guidelines, if the instructor is delivering to a larger area of pool space than usual, they should consider their voice projection and protection, using a microphone may help with this but microphones with foam mouthpieces should not be shared. The use of demonstrations can help with participant understanding as well as visual cards.

Updates

Page 6:

Additional point added:

"Consider your communications and communication methods to make sure they are inclusive and that participants can access them."

Page 6:

Update to point: "Offer pre-bookable sessions only. **These should be bookable in at least two ways, e.g. online and by phone.**"

Page 8:

Additional sentence to 1. Customer Journey.

"Communications should be inclusive and information provided through a variety of methods (e.g. online and print) to ensure all participants can access this information."

Page 11:

For illustrative purposes, accessible access added to diagram.

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